

BOOK REVIEWS

mothers. The final four chapters, written by different mothers, address “what I wish I knew about early motherhood.”

Many breastfeeding mothers reported that advice was inadequate, that their usual ways of assessing situations and educating themselves no longer held, and many were left with devastating feelings of inadequacy. One mother (who had earned a doctorate) no longer benefited from her usual strategies for learning; just when a problem seemed to be solved, the problem changed, and once again she was unable to help her baby well enough. She kept seeking the aid of resource people and finally found one who was very helpful; yet, she concluded, as did many other mothers, that the “ride it out, it is over fast enough” solution worked best.

McCue recommends nurses and lactation consultants (like herself), but often they gave inadequate and conflicting advice. Evidently, the complexity of breastfeeding is still under-recognized in the formal health care system. If mothers do not receive the information and guidance they need to successfully breastfeed their infants, they cannot be blamed when difficulties arise.

McCue’s book is intended for mothers of newborns and infants. Hence, it lacks the kind of demographic analysis that would be useful to academics, nurses, midwives, and lactation consultants. It offers invaluable advice, however, for mothers who worry when their babies are having difficulty breathing, sucking, or sleeping; being alone in a bassinet; suffering with allergies, skin rashes, or life-threatening problems. A section on the safety of clothing and wraps would have been a useful addition to the volume. Most importantly, McCue encourages new mothers to trust their own observations and instincts.

Mother Talk: Conversations with Mothers of Lesbian Daughters and FTM Transgender Children

Sarah F. Pearlman.

Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2012.

Reviewed by Alison McEwen

The voices of those who have come out as lesbian or gay are represented in many books and today are heard in a number of fora. Less frequently heard are the voices of those women who mother lesbian, gay, and transgender individuals. Sarah Pearlman’s book, *Mother Talk*, offers 24 stories told by women whose children have come out either as lesbian or female-to-male (FTM) transgender.

Pearlman is a psychologist who has worked for many years in the area of lesbian studies. She became interested in the experiences of the mothers of lesbian daughters both through her work and after coming out to her own mother strained their relationship during her mother's final year. This book is a reflection of the tension and sadness in her relationship with her own mother, even as it explores the experiences of other daughters and mothers.

The interviews in *Mother Talk* are best understood within their respective historical, social and, cultural contexts. The earlier interviews were collected in North America throughout 1990. Pearlman recognized a changing social landscape and explored whether increasing social acceptance had changed mothers' experiences in further interviews conducted in 2000 and 2001. The invitation to participate in the later interviews drew a number of responses from the mothers of adult children who had or were transitioning from female to male. The book incorporates 24 stories, 12 from mothers of lesbian daughters and 12 from mothers of FTM transgender children, eight of whom initially came out as lesbians.

Each story evokes the experience of a mother who must come to terms with her daughter living a life that Pearlman describes as being "outside of social norms" (14). The stories are grouped thematically. They explore devastation, loss, adolescence, connection, and activism; present a wide range of reactions to disclosure; and explore the subsequent relationship between mother and child.

Disclosure was experienced as a time of crisis for each mother, with many describing a period of intense emotion which included fearing for the safety of her daughter and grieving for grandchildren she may never have. Mothers of FTM transgender children spoke of the loss of their daughters and the mother-daughter relationship, of their struggle to use the male pronoun and their children's new name. The stories gathered here span a wide range of mother-daughter relationships after disclosure: from loving acceptance, to little or no contact, to a complete breakdown in the relationship.

This volume should be read by mothers and daughters alike. Mothers who find something of their own experiences in the pages of this book will feel less isolated. At the same time, daughters may come to better understand their mothers' struggles with the varied and difficult emotions associated with coming out. *Mother Talk* is a valuable addition to the literature about families with queer children.